Total responses received: 16

All task force members participated, except for co-chairs who are facilitating task force operations and compiling final report.

This task force is information gathering only. Full responses will be submitted with the final report. The Joint Legislative Oversight and Sunset Committee ("JLOSC") will meet in January 2020 to review the final report.

Tabled Recommendation	JLOSC should NOT consider	JLOSC should consider as written	JLOSC should consider WITH modifications
Rec. 16 – Fill Agency Vacancies	3	8	5
Rec. 17 – Increase Staff Certifications	2	4	10
Rec. 18 – Increase Braille Resources	3	6	7
Rec. 19 – Funding and Grants for Assistive Technology	0	10	6
Rec. 20 – DVI Staff Training on Assistive Technology	2	7	7
Rec. 21 – Equip Rapid Ready Rooms	2	9	5
Rec. 23 – Recruitment (staff)	1	8	7
Rec. 24 – Orientation and Mobility (O&M)	3	4	9
Rec. 29 – Reporting Requirement Regarding Prior Task Force	3	8	5

## Final Report Participation Deadline: Friday, November 8, 2019

If you did not submit a response you may do so by the final report participation deadline. Blank worksheets are on the task force website, Survey Monkey option is available (can be anonymous), or you may call Amanda McAtee for completion assistance.

Task force website: <a href="https://bit.ly/2H0lhWC\">https://bit.ly/2H0lhWC\</a>

## Rec. 16 – Fill Agency Vacancies:

There are currently 12 vacancies in DVI: 9 in the Education Unit, 2 in the Orientation and Mobility Unit, and 1 in the vocational rehabilitation unit. DVI shall work to fill these vacancies.

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- DHSS should assist to conduct studies to benchmark salaries, loan forgiveness, continuing education, and other incentives to ensure competiveness with surrounding states
- Consider using an independent consultant to assist with increasing recruitment and retention rates
- DVI should consult with the State of Delaware Department of Human Resources to ensure the agency is following the State's hiring protocol
  - Work with DHR to reclassify and increase salaries of TVI and O&M positions to attract qualified individuals.
- JLOSC should support draft legislation to provide hiring and retention incentives to certified TVIs and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists.
- Turnover rate is high within agency.
  - DVI should conduct studies regarding performance, organizational culture, and developmental training to better understand causes in order to mitigate the issues.
- If additional O&M staff were to be hired, downstate would benefit.
- Remove education services from DHSS and place within a qualified education department or local education authority (LEA).
- Place education services for visually impaired students under the supervision of DOE for additional oversight & resources.

## Rec. 16 - Fill Agency Vacancies:

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#### JLOSC should not consider

- Basic function of any state agency.
- Vacancies fluctuate with all State agencies.
- DVI actively recruits for all vacancies.
- National Shortage of Vision Rehabilitation Professionals and Teachers for the Visually Impaired.
- DVI has been effectively closing the gap between the statutory teacher to student ratio and the recommended ratio.
- Updated Current Agency Vacancies (as of 09/09/2019):
  - o 4 Teacher Positions\*
  - 1 O&M Specialist\*
  - 1 Employment Service Specialist (vacated 08/30/19)
  - 1 Trainer/Educator II Technology (vacated 08/30/19)
  - 1 Supply Distribution Clerk (vacated 07/04/19)\*\*
  - 1 Social Service Senior Administrator\*\*

<sup>\*</sup> Due to a lack of qualified candidates these positions have remained vacant since their creation in 2016 (positions were repurposed/reclassified by DHSS and provided to DVI in 2016)

<sup>\*\*</sup>Currently in the hiring process to fill vacancy

#### Rec. 17 - Increase Staff Certifications:

DVI shall work to increase staff certifications. Only 5 DVI employees hold Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals ("ACVREP") certifications. There is no known DVI employee that holds a certification from Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America ("RESNA") or a National Certification in Unified English Braille ("NCUEB") by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board ("NBPCB").

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- DVI currently employs 6 O&M specialists, O&M requires ACVREP certification, which is specific to O&M, and all O&M employees with DVI hold this certification. (as of 09/09/2019)
  - 2 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists also holds an ACVREP certification
- DVI should complete an assessment of all positions to ensure that job requirements are sufficient to effectively execute duties and qualifications are in line with national standards.
  - Education and certification requirements should be added where appropriate.
  - Provide incentives for current employees to gain education or certifications where appropriate
    - Incentives should be provided under contract in order to retain employee once education/certification is completed
      - Employee would repay in breach of contract situation.
- TVIs, Assistive Technology educators, O&Ms, and other professionals
  providing direct services to individuals with visual impairments and their
  families to include appropriate certifications at the time or within six months
  from hire (unless the certification is required to provide direct service)
- National Certification from AER, NCUEB, nor RESNA is not recognized universally and is not a requirement of hire with DOE, although DOE will allow for salary increases upon completion.
- AER, RESNA, and NCUEB entities serve as a testing resource, not programs for training.

- CNIB, UEBOnline.org, Library of Congress, Hadley School for the Blind-Professional Studies, and Texas School for the Blind (TSBVI)-Professional. Some of these programs offer certifications as a culmination of their training programs.
  - Library of Congress offers a nationally recognized Braille Transcribing Program through National Library Services. Offers a thorough course of study for teachers of braille.
- Nationally, most TVIs nationally do not hold the NCUEB certification.
  - o All TVIs must demonstrate for competency in UEB.

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#### JLOSC should not consider

- DVI positions are part of the State of Delaware's Merit Classification System
  - Teachers for the Visually Impaired and O&M Specialists are exceptions
  - DE Merit Classifications for the Assistive Technology and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (Independent Living) positions are included in the State's generic Trainer/Educator Career Ladder
    - Job requirements for this career ladder do not require higher education, such as a Bachelor's Degree.
      - Certain certifications require higher education degrees
- DVI utilizes core competencies, professional development, and attendance at Assistive Technology and vision rehabilitation conferences as training opportunities.
- DVI has worked with Delaware Human Resource Management to develop promotional standards to encourage certification
  - Currently, in the Trainer/Educator Career Ladder, level three requires certification.
- Certified Assistive Technology Instructional Specialist for People with Visual Impairments (CATIS) – is a certification specific for the visually impaired
- 8 DVI staff members hold ACVREP certification (6 O&M Specialists and 2 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapists) (as of 09/09/2019)
- DVI staff hold all required certifications.

- DVI includes Unified English Braille (UEB) proficiency in staff training programs and obtains professional development opportunities each year.
- Teachers of the Visually Impaired complete a Braille Proficiency Exam to be credentialed.
- The transcriptionist in the Men with a Message program have their Letter of Proficiency in UEB.
- Additional resources would be needed if personnel costs increased.

#### Rec. 18 - Increase Braille Resources:

DVI shall increase braille resources for its consumers. The Hadley School for the Blind offers braille instruction courses by mail to sighted and visually impaired students. They offer braille courses tuition-free for visually impaired students. The National Federation of the Blind has free resources for braille certification.

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- Require individual braille instruction to learn how to track properly and read with 2 hands.
  - Learning by mail is not acceptable.
  - o Emphasis on finger placement.
  - Providing education on the difference between a braille writer and slate and stylus.
    - The letters are written backwards on a slate and stylus because they are written from the back of the paper, from right to left.
- DVI should employ or contract with qualified vendors or individuals with expertise in accessibility and assistive technology who will provide group and individualized training to ALL members of the community (not just individuals with open vocational rehabilitation cases).
- DVI shall offer noncredit and community accessible local courses and training, in collaboration with all of Delaware's colleges and universities, to empower individuals with visual impairments to utilize effectively all modes of technology.
- The Library of Congress, through the National Library Services has a nationally recognized Braille Transcribing Program.
  - o Provides course of study for teachers of braille. T
  - Provides extensive knowledge of the braille code necessary for braille instruction.
    - Students are kept informed about changes in the braille code.
- The Texas School for the Blind (TSBVI), Perkins, National Braille Press, and Lighthouse for the Blind are also resources for braille instruction.
- DVI should have certified Braille instructors available for adult and newly visually impaired consumers.

- Braille reading should move from paper format to electronic and digital applications.
- Braille resources should be provided for education in refreshable Braille displaces and other accessibility devices.
- DVI should incorporate state of the art technology and certified instructors into operational practices.
- It appears that DVI is currently providing braille training to consumers in a variety of formats. Maybe they should include data and on metrics from consumers to determine if they need and or desire additional training. If so the consumers should be specific to address their concerns. Vocational Rehabilitation is about consumer choice.

#### Rec. 18 – Increase Braille Resources:

DVI shall increase braille resources for its consumers. The Hadley School for the Blind offers braille instruction courses by mail to sighted and visually impaired students. They offer braille courses tuition-free for visually impaired students. The National Federation of the Blind has free resources for braille certification.

#### JLOSC should not consider

- Braille is one of many tools used with the visually impaired.
- Some visually impaired individuals do not have interest in learning braille.
- Braille instruction is consumer driven for adults.
  - Assessment tools are used to determine braille interest.
- Braille instruction is provided according to Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students.
  - When included in a student's IEP, Teachers for the Visually Impaired teach braille literacy.
- For adults, DVI provides one on one instruction by Certified Vision Rehabilitation Specialists which use resources such as Hadley, Perkins, the Library of Congress and other tools to supplement the curriculum.
- DVI hosts a Braille Club on a monthly basis.
- DVI currently has 12 adults actively learning braille.

#### Rec. 19 – Funding and Grants for Assistive Technology:

DVI shall actively search and procure funding and grants for assistive technology to aid the DVI consumers.

## ■ JLOSC should consider with modifications 6 out of 16 respondents selected this option, response summary:

- DVI should seek out individuals who are qualified to write grants or provide training to existing employees on grant writing.
  - Grant writing is an important tool to utilize funding from outside sources in order to better support its consumers.
- DVI should actively seek resources from various sources for assistive technology to aid DVI consumers.
  - DVI currently reviews and will continue to review the Federal Register for grant opportunities.
    - Procuring funding is never a guarantee and should not be a part of the recommendation.
- DVI should seek out collaborations with community organizations that have an expanded opportunity to grants that are often not available to state/government agencies.
  - Private funds often require applicants to be non-profit, 501(c)(3)
     organizations; there are fewer opportunities for government agencies.
- The State of Delaware should fund, through appropriate budgeting, programs designed to provide access to and ownership of Assistive Technology, to individuals with visual impairments.
  - This funding shall be utilized to sustain training, education, and tools necessary to gain effective access to information and the environment.
  - Education is an entitlement, which requires assistive technology needs of students to be met.
    - Children in schools receive the assistive technology required because education is considered an entitlement.
- DVI should research technology accessibility innovations/trends and procure those new and advanced tools to make available to consumers.

- Assistive technology is provided based on the needs of the individual related to their disability and their vocational goal.
  - Vocational Rehabilitation is an eligibility program focused on reducing barriers to employment.
    - Vocational Rehabilitation participants are provided the necessary technologies to perform their job independently.
- DVI already provides consumers with resources to acquire low-cost assistive technology solutions such as Computers for The Blind.
  - Low-end technology is provided to the elderly; higher-end technology is a need for many DVI consumers not connected to Education or Vocational Rehabilitation
    - The agency works to repurpose or loan equipment when possible or collaborate with community resources to obtain technology, when available.
- Assistive Technology is very broad topic and should be defined as lower or higher end products.
  - Hand-held magnifier is a lower end example.
  - Laptop with JAWS is a higher end example.
    - There is a gap in purchasing higher end equipment for older Delawareans with low vision or who have lost their vision.

#### Rec. 20 – DVI Staff Training on Assistive Technology:

DVI shall actively search and utilize training for DVI staff on the topic of Assistive Technology. Organizations such as RESNA offer resources.

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- DVI employees that work with the assistive technology are not certified and should be.
  - Would like to see certifications in Apple, Jaws for Windows, and to keep up with modern technology.
  - o DVI is using old equipment.
    - Consumers seek out training from outside (non-DVI) resources such as Apple.
  - Utilize train the trainer model
  - Build training and continuing education into job performance standards and expectations.
- DVI should have certified technology staff as well as teacher staff on products used by consumers.
  - The supervisor of technology staff should hold certifications in assistive technology on multiple devices and should be required to proficiently instruct other staff as well as consumers.
- Specifically request that any such instruction should be with, preferably, a blind trainer, or someone with extensive training working with blind and visually impaired individuals.
  - While assistive technology trainers are knowledgeable about the technology and devices, they are not knowledgeable with regard to the specifics of the accessibility features available within the devices to appropriately train staff so that they may instruct visually impaired and blind consumers.
- DVI should establish guidelines and measurable goals with oversight to enforce compliance with whatever recommendation is adopted by the JLOSC.
- RESNA doesn't seem to have much for visual impairment professionals, perhaps a different organization.
  - Free or low cost sources should be used.

- DVI should obtain funding and support from the State's budget to ensure that individuals with visual impairments that demonstrate competence are assisted in the selection of appropriate assistive technology to meet their needs.
  - Provide ongoing education and training in the use of the selected device(s)
  - Empower individuals to utilize technology in a functional and meaningful manner.

## Rec. 20 - DVI Staff Training on Assistive Technology:

DVI shall actively search and utilize training for DVI staff on the topic of Assistive Technology. Organizations such as RESNA offer resources.

#### JLOSC should not consider

- This recommendation is redundant with recommendation number 17, which was aimed at increasing staff certifications.
- DVI historically and currently provides access to assistive technology professional development from a variety of sources.

## Rec. 21 – Equip Rapid Ready Rooms:

DVI shall equip rapid ready rooms with meaningful resources and explore technology advances. DVI shall search for and apply for any available training grants available from Apple or Microsoft.

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- DVI should staff rapid ready rooms with an instructor, currently rapid ready rooms do not have any DVI staff.
  - Instructors should be certified or at least trained in Apple,
     Jaws for Windows, and to keep up with modern technology.
  - Staff should be well equipped for community engagement.
  - DVI should utilize other subject matter experts related to technology training.
- State appropriations should be designated to support procurement of assistive technology, applications (Apps), and other devices and tools necessary to support independent and functional community engagement.
- Sounds like a good idea in theory however, there are concerns involving funding and the type and amount of equipment to be purchased.
- Currently DVI lacks resources and individuals qualified to provide this type of service.
  - Many grants require a non-profit applicant.
  - DVI should partner with organizations such as BlindSight Delaware or the National Federation for the Blind in order to obtain grant related opportunities.
- DVI should replace equipment within a specified time period.
  - DVI should pay for all equipment within 60 days.
- DVI should establish additional outside resources for rapid ready training for employment ready customers beyond Microsoft and Apple.

#### Rec. 21 - Equip Rapid Ready Rooms:

DVI shall equip rapid ready rooms with meaningful resources and explore technology advances. DVI shall search for and apply for any available training grants available from Apple or Microsoft.

#### JLOSC should not consider

- The rapid ready rooms were designed to quickly offer assistive technology solutions.
- Limitations include:
  - Due to quickly changing technology, rapid ready room products required constant upgrading or sat unused.
  - "guessing" what will be needed for employment or training programs; thus items become discontinued or new versions are released resulting in an overstock of items that are not used.
  - There are program specific restrictions by federal grants that limit the repurposing of the equipment that remains overstocked in inventory.
- DVI's Assistive Technology Centers are equipped with various technologies for demonstration.
  - DVI assists with loaning equipment or providing trial versions of software.
  - Since Rapid Ready was piloted in 2012, DVI has streamlined it procedures to reduce the time it takes to order and receive equipment.
    - Streamlined procedures avoid wasteful purchasing.

## Rec. 23 – Recruitment (staff):

DVI shall:

- a. Partner with high schools and colleges and participate in recruitment events to highlight careers available with DVI and the need for certified professionals in the field of special education.
- b. Explore offering internship programs to encourage students to pursue degrees and certifications in special education.

#### ■ JLOSC should consider with modifications

- DVI should focus on the recruitment and retention of employees
  - Offer a variety of incentives such as education reimbursement
  - Evaluate the agency's culture, compensation, and supervision issues that may impact retention and recruitment
  - Explore other means of recruitment and develop a recruitment plan and modify quarterly if necessary.
- DVI should align with colleges to develop degree/certification/recertification programming for blind and visually impaired instruction in multiple areas including, but not limited to, Vocational Rehabilitation, education, assistive technology, braille transcription, and Orientation and Mobility, in order to develop and maintain professional expertise within the State of Delaware.
- Explore offering internship programs to encourage students to pursue degrees and certifications in Vision Rehabilitation and Teachers of the Visually Impaired.
  - Explore offering paid internship programs.
- Partner with high schools and colleges and participate in recruitment events to highlight careers available with DVI and the need for certified professionals in the field of Vision Rehabilitation and Teachers of the Visually Impaired.

- The words "special education" in the recommendation should be changed to "visually impairments."
  - Special education is not necessarily the only/ best field leading to a job in assistive tech, O&M, vocational rehabilitation, or independent living skills.
- DVI already partners with multiple schools and universities to recruit qualified candidates.
- DVI would appreciate assistance convincing local universities to add masters level programs that meet the needs of the specialized positions.

## Rec. 23 – Recruitment (staff):

DVI shall:

- a. Partner with high schools and colleges and participate in recruitment events to highlight careers available with DVI and the need for certified professionals in the field of special education.
- b. Explore offering internship programs to encourage students to pursue degrees and certifications in special education.

#### JLOSC should not consider

1 out of 16 respondents selected this option, response summary:

 It the respondent's belief that DVI is making every effort to fill their vacancies.

## Rec. 24 – Orientation and Mobility (O&M):

DVI shall incorporate the use of GPS technology in their Orientation and Mobility program.

#### JLOSC should consider with modifications

- O&M goals should be based on individual client need, interest, and skills. If a client is unsafe crossing streets or traveling in the community, GPS may not be the best option at that time.
  - The incorporation of instrumentation, technology, and other instructional processes should be left to the educational team.
- A survey or primary data should be collected to determine if this is a primary concern for consumers. Not every consumer wants to learn technology when it comes to O&M training.
- Guide dog schools are training their students with GPS technology and their dog.
- At least 2 sessions per week O&M instruction, each session at least 1 hour in length, after the evaluation is done
- Majority of O&M students prefer to use GPS on their phone.
  - Include android and IOS apps including Siri, Alexis, Cortera, etc.
- The DVI O&M program should be evaluated and benchmarked against some of the leading programs in the nation such as Maryland School for the Blind and Perkins School for the Blind.
  - In this way, DVI can incorporate industry best practices into their work and raise the bar on O&M and provide more comprehensive and relevant offerings.

- O&M Specialists should research and provide a list of resources for navigation and orientation to communities (visual and audible maps).
- O&M specialists must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a multitude of competencies in O&M, including but not limited to assistive technology, low vision tools, and modalities designed to enhance independent movement and orientation.
- O&M instructors should be trained in using modern technology advances in the field of O&M.
- O&M specialists working with children should obtain or upon hire possess special education or related educational degrees or certifications to ensure the safety and effective learning of students.
- In addition to the existing O&M Program instruction, DVI should also incorporate other navigational aids including cane and robotic devices.
  - DVI should procure state of the art navigational aids and obtain instructional certifications in the same.
  - DVI should not limit consumers, but rather research and procure innovative tools that will advance independence for consumers who are blind.

## Rec. 24 – Orientation and Mobility (O&M):

DVI shall incorporate the use of GPS technology in their Orientation and Mobility program.

#### JLOSC should not consider

- GPS can be a useful tool, however it is technology. O&M should be teaching and strengthening these skills. Not everyone has or wants GPS. This is more a technology related issue.
- O&M consumers are trained to navigate throughout the community without GPS because it is not always available.
  - Sometimes cell phones lose service.
- All consumers are provided the choice of using GPS to navigate in addition to traditional training. It is, and should remain, an individual choice.
- There are several tools available for orientation and mobility/safe travel. GPS is one of many that DVI incorporates into training depending on the needs of the individual. Outside of basic cane techniques, it is an individual's choice to select technology, if any, that best meets their needs.
  - Focusing on a "device" rather than a technique is challenging if the "device" malfunctions or is unavailable
- DVI's O&M team participates annually in profession specific summits/roundtable/ professional development regarding best practices in the field, including technology.

#### Rec. 29 – Reporting Requirement Regarding Prior Task Force:

DVI shall report to the JLOSC on the implementation status of the recommendations made by the Blind and Visually Impaired Education Task Force. DVI shall implement the task force recommendations.

# ■ JLOSC should consider with modifications 5 out of 16 respondents selected this option, response summary:

- DVI should review the prior task force and ensure that applicable recommendations are implemented.
- Establish penalties when goals are not accomplished.
- Establish an effective system of agency oversight.
- The State of Delaware, through DHSS, DOE, or another independent agency, shall hire an independent monitor to ensure that all 2015 Task Force recommendations are implemented, audited, and monitored.
- JLOSC shall draft and sponsor the legislation required to implement task force recommendations.
- DVI may need guidance in the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force.
  - A resource for DVI staff needs to be established so that questions can be addressed expediently.
  - An overseer should be considered to verify and maintain the forward motion of the compliance to the recommendations.
  - Further, non-compliance actions should be considered and exacted within the documentation.
  - DVI should implement the task force recommendations by a certain date.
  - There should be a due date of progress, steps completion should be stated.

#### Rec. 29 – Reporting Requirement Regarding Prior Task Force:

DVI shall report to the JLOSC on the implementation status of the recommendations made by the Blind and Visually Impaired Education Task Force. DVI shall implement the task force recommendations.

#### JLOSC should not consider

- The education task force has already resolved this.
- DVI has been working diligently to achieve all the goals on the Strategic Plan to Improve Educational Services for Students who are Blind and Visually Impaired, which was included with the original report.
- The Taskforce Recommendations were used as the basis for the Strategic Plan for Education.
- DVI and DOE share responsibility in five core areas (curriculum, instruction/literacy; pre-service/in-service; family engagement/systems and assistive technology)
- This 2016 report was developed by the majority of the same stakeholders.
  - https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dvi/files/dvi-report-2016.pdf